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The Valley

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■ SANTA CLARA COUNTY
■ BAY AREA



INSIDE

BAY AREA Officials aren't sure whether an auto shop fire, left, was part of postgame vandalism Sunday in Oakland. | **3B**

SCHOOL SCENE Students will visit companies in Silicon Valley and shadow their mentors. | **2B**

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1,200 will get well water tested

Contamination of the underground aquifers by the chemical perchlorate in the South County may take many years and cost millions of dollars to clean up.

By Frank Sweeney
Mercury News

More than 1,200 South County residents, worried that a chemical used in rocket fuel and highway flares has contaminated their drinking water, have contacted the Santa Clara Valley Water District to arrange for free tests of their wells.

By Monday evening, four days after officials disclosed that the chemical perchlorate has spread in an underground plume four miles south from Morgan Hill through San Martin, appointments had been made to test more than 450 private wells beginning Wednesday, water district officials said. Most of the wells serve more than one house.

The district has also launched a program to provide

everyone potentially affected by the contamination with free bottled water for drinking and cooking.

District officials have gotten initial requests for more than 4,000 bottles of water. About 200 homes were getting the free water from Crystal Springs on Monday, with an additional 200 scheduled to receive bottled water Wednesday. The sudden demand resulted in the water company temporarily running out of bottles, said water district spokesman Mike Di Marco.

Meanwhile, officials continued to investigate how far the

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PERCHLORATE: Map shows area of contamination. **PAGE 4B**

WELLS | 1,200 South County residents have arranged for free tests

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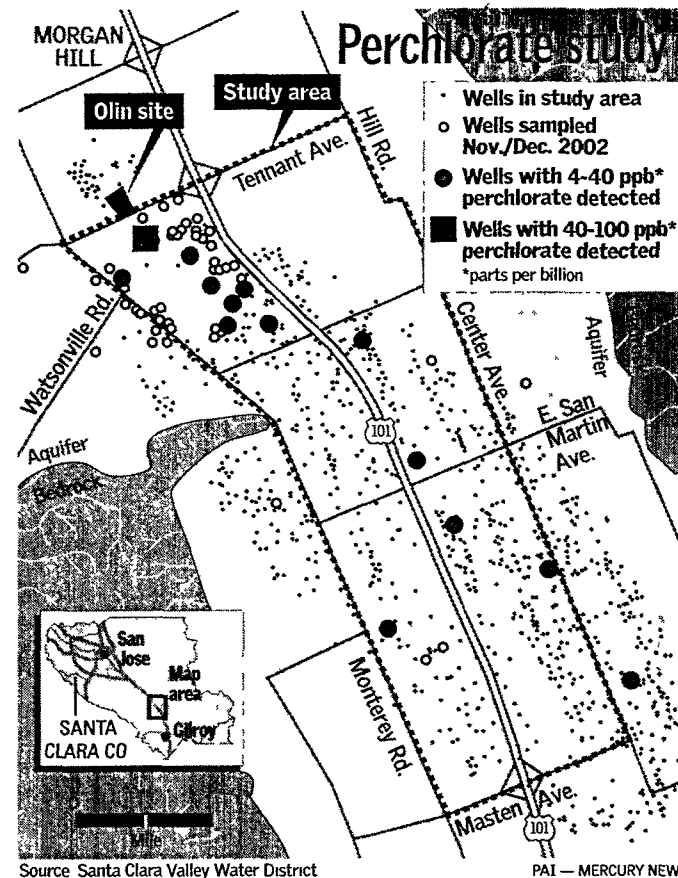
perchlorate has spread into the underground aquifers. If past groundwater pollution incidents are any guide, the cleanup will take years and could cost millions of dollars.

Perchlorate is a salt that disrupts iodine intake in the thyroid gland, which regulates hormone functions. It is especially harmful to pregnant women and infants and can interfere with neurological development in fetuses. Some studies suggest it can cause thyroid cancer.

Water district officials estimate as many as 450 wells could be contaminated by perchlorate that has leached from a 13-acre site at Tennant and Railroad avenues in Morgan Hill where the Olin Corp. manufactured highway safety flares from 1955 to 1996.

Last March, perchlorate was detected at a Morgan Hill municipal well 250 feet from the Olin site. City officials shut down the well immediately. That event caused the water district and the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, a state agency, to test water in some wells off the Olin site.

"When the contamination hit the city well, there was no indication that the plume extended beyond there," Di Marco said. "It was reasonable to think that



the concentrations were accumulating at the site because of the power of the well to move water toward it."

Further well tests in concentric circles around the site indicated the plume moved south. Perchlorate has turned up four

miles away in a well near Masten Avenue in Gilroy.

"When the test results came in last week, they indicated a larger problem than we anticipated," Di Marco said.

The highest concentrations were found in a well at the U-

Save Rockery near the Olin site. Lesser amounts were found farther away.

Once the extent of the contamination has been determined, the cleanup will be a long difficult process, officials said.

Olin has been ordered by the Regional Water Quality Control Board to clean up the contamination and pay all costs. Olin first will clean up the soil at the Morgan Hill site to prevent more perchlorate from moving into the underground aquifers, said Jim Crowley, who heads the district's underground cleanup programs.

The next step would be to clean the groundwater in the immediate area. The water would be pumped out, treated with ultraviolet light and peroxide, or ozone, or with biological systems to remove the chemical.

However, these treatments are expensive and not available to individual well owners.

Treated water could be used for agricultural irrigation or, if it meets higher standards, could be recharged back into the ground, Crowley explained.

"We need to cut off the source of the plume so it doesn't grow, then remove the groundwater from the plume" for treatment, he said.

A number of special extraction wells need to be drilled to pump out the water, he said. If

an existing well is pumped to clear out the perchlorate, the well's action could draw more contamination into it from nearby areas.

"Considerable research has to be done," Crowley said. "We're going to be monitoring this. We want to ensure that the investigation and cleanup proceeds aggressively."

Other groundwater contamination cases in the Santa Clara Valley have been cleaned up successfully, Crowley said. However, each took years to accomplish.

The issue first surfaced in 1981 when it was discovered that tanks containing industrial solvents at Fairchild Camera in South San Jose and at other South Bay companies had leaked into drinking water wells.

A plume from the IBM facility in San Jose that stretched several miles has been reduced by 95 percent through groundwater extraction and treatment, Crowley said. The Fairchild plume was reduced by 98 percent, and a supermarket has since been built on top of what once was a Superfund site.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

Private well owners in the affected area should contact the water district on the Perchlorate Hot Line, (408) 265-2607, extension 2649 to arrange for free testing of their water. More information is available on the district's Web site, www.valleywater.org.

Contact Frank Sweeney at fsweeney@sjmercury.com or (408) 920-5675.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE OF JOINT PUBLIC HEARING BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN JOSE AND THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF THE CITY OF SAN JOSE ON THE LEASE OF CERTAIN RETAIL SPACE LOCATED WITHIN THE PUBLIC PARKING GARAGE LOCATED ON THE NORTH SIDE OF EAST SAN CARLOS STREET BETWEEN SECOND STREET AND THIRD STREET, IN THE SAN ANTONIO PLAZA REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT AREA, SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, PURSUANT TO CALIFORNIA HEALTH AND SAFETY CODE SECTIONS 33431 AND 33433

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that on January 28, 2003, at the hour of 1:30 p.m., or as soon thereafter as the matter can be heard, the Council of the City of San Jose and the Board of Directors of the Redevelopment Agency of the City of San Jose will conduct a Joint Public Hearing in Council Chambers, City Hall, 801 North First Street, San Jose, California 95110, regarding the lease by the Agency to Camera Cinemas Management Corp. of certain retail space located within the public parking garage located on the north side of East San Carlos Street between Second Street and Third Street, in San Jose, California, for use as a movie theater showing primarily independent and art films supported by a café